

Why the Robin's Breast is Red

'Told they no more loved, perhaps—
 Tho' they loved in their chosen way—
 The Christmas creeds and the Christmas deeds
 Than we who live today.
 But the world was far more childlike then,
 While we have wiser grown;
 And rather scorn their quaint beliefs
 In favor of our own.

One fact they held as true as faith:
 At the time of the Saviour's birth
 The season moved in the sea, the sky
 And the smallest things of earth.
 The beasts of the field were led to speak.
 The stones had tongues for words—
 Trees, grasses, blooms were eloquent
 And speech was with the birds.

Scarce was a beast in all the field
 Or bird in all the wood;
 Those simple folk at Christmas time
 Made not a theme of good.
 And when the humble meal was done,
 Or humbler gifts were sped,
 They told of them strange-fancied tales,
 And what they did and said.

All simple stories mainly meant
 To teach the noble part,
 That sympathy and pity's due
 Should hold in every heart.
 And one ran thus: "Long years ago
 The robin at the door
 Upon his breast in winter days
 No shield of crimson wore

"But as time passed when Christmas dawned
 The bird in love's good will
 And charity, with cooling water's store
 Would fill its tiny bill.
 Then, flying to that trying place—
 To purgatory—where
 Souls thirsted in the flames, would leave
 The drop of water there."

Aye, even more these untaught folk believed:
 They said the robin came
 So bent and zealous in his task
 It heeded not the flame.
 And scorched even there where it had sought
 To make its presence blest,
 Has since been scarred—sweet Mercy's badge—
 With red upon the breast.

The lesson is not in the deed
 So much as in the will,
 And while the world shall run its round
 Must hold its value still.
 The smaller works of charity
 Of sacrifice and pain,
 With no thought save of God and love
 Are those of richest gain.

—PETER H. DOYLE.

